Wells Cathedral

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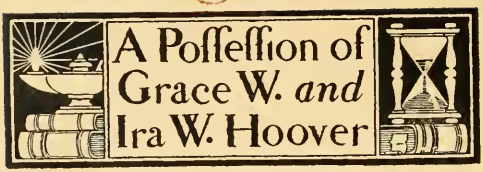
The Rev. Canon Church

Illustrated by
Herbert Railton



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Wells Cathedral

By

The Rev. C. M. Church, M.A.

Canon of Wells

Illustrated by
Herbert Railton

London: Isbister & Co. Ltd.
15 & 16 Tavistock Street Covent Garden
MDCCCXCVII

Wells Cathedral

The Saxon Church

"Central peace subsisting at the heart
Of endless agitation."—WORDSWORTH.

THIS might be a motto descriptive of the Church of Wells, enfolded in a green and sheltered valley, under the Mendip Hills, where the springs which run through the limestone rock burst out in the "bottomless wells" of living water, reflecting gable and pinnacle and tower, in still evening hours.

It has had a singularly uneventful and almost peaceful history.

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At the beginning of the eighth century, A.D. 709, Aldhelm, first bishop of the new see of Sherborne, died at the little wooden church of Doulting, on the crest of the Mendip, which looks down through green combes over the western plain of Somerset to the Severn Sea. In his missionary work through this half Celtic district he had moved the convert king Ina to repair the waste places of Glastonbury. About the same time a frontier settlement of secular priests was planted at the foot of the hill country, and a wooden church of St. Andrew rose by the head of the springing wells.

There is little to be told of its earlier history, while the heathen Dane was harrying England, until at last Alfred had sallied from the moor fastness of Athelney, and the treaty of Wedmore gave peace to Wessex.

Then, when the land had rest under Edward son of Alfred, Somerset received a

Wells from N E

bishop of its own, and his seat was planted by the water side at "the great fountain of St. Andrew," A. D. 909. During the tenth century Glastonbury reached its height as the chief monastic house in England, rich in its possessions, in its claims to a saintly ancestry, and in the influence and fame of its second founder, Dunstan, the chief man of his time, primate, and minister of Edmund, and of Edgar, the overlord of Britain.

During the same period the see of the Sumersetas at Wells was growing from obscurity to alliance and rivalry with the abbey.

Glastonbury was the school which then trained bishops for many of the sees in England. Three brethren of the house passed to the bishop's seat at Wells, and thence to the chair of Augustine and Theodore at Canterbury.

Athelm, first bishop, was Dunstan's kinsman, and succeeded Plegmund, Alfred's

archbishop. Wulfhelm succeeded him, both at Wells and Canterbury, was primate at Athelstan's coronation at Kingston, in 925, and outlived the battle of Brunanburgh and Athelstan's death in 940.

For a short time during Edwy's reign and Dunstan's banishment, Brithelm, bishop of Wells, was Edwy's minister, and was appointed by him to Canterbury; but Edgar's triumph brought Dunstan back, and Brithelm retired to his see at Wells. At his death in 973, Glastonbury again supplied to Wells, though a secular church, the next two bishops, Kyneward "the good," whose death the Saxon chronicle records in the monody on King Edgar, and Sigar, abbot and bishop, 975 to 997.

Ethelwold, the moving spirit in the struggle between monks and seculars, yet tolerated the secular rule at Wells, as he retained the secular canons whom he found at York, living under the stricter rule of Metz which Bishop Giso soon afterwards introduced at

View from S East

Wells. One more bishop of Wells, Living, is described by the chronicler as "sagacious before God and before the world," in very difficult times. Appointed Primate by Ethelred, in the time of disaster at Canterbury, after the murder of Archbishop Elphege by the Danes, 1011, he was taken into Normandy by Ethelred, after the submission of the Western Thanes to Cnut at Bath, and it was his lot after Ethelred's death, 1016, to crown in St. Paul's minster, in the same year his successor Edmund Ironside, and in the next year Cnut the Dane, 1017.

In Edward the Confessor's time came to Wells the foreign bishops from Lorraine, Dudoc and Giso, the two last bishops buried in the Saxon church at Wells, each in his niche on either side of the high altar. Giso was present when Edward wore his crown for the last time, on Christmas day, 1065 ; he was at the dedication of St. Peter's in Westminster on Holy Innocents' day, 1066, and

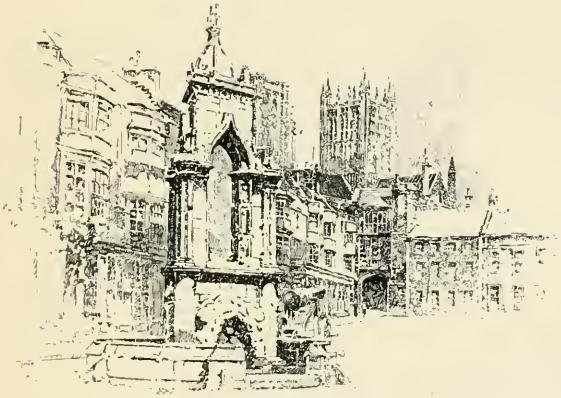
on the following Christmas he assisted at the coronation of William the Norman. He introduced into Wells, as Leofric his countryman had introduced into Exeter, the semi-monastic rule for secular canons which had been established by Chrodegang of Metz. Here, at Wells, on the ground south of the present church, he built a dormitory, refectory and cloister for his canons, increased in number to fifty, whom he brought under stricter discipline as a celibate brotherhood employed in parochial as well as in canonical offices.

Late excavations on this site in 1894 have revealed the foundations of a chapel, the same perhaps which he endowed with land at Wootton, and which survived on this spot under changed architecture as the "Lady Chapel near the cloister," into the fifteenth century; and also a channelled watercourse from St. Andrew's spring, of ancient date, which may have brought the water to the Saxon buildings on this site.

During his time, and chiefly by his diplomatic skill in troublous days of change, the lands and possessions of the see had so increased that at the Domesday survey of 1086, two years before his death, the bishop held more than one-twelfth of the shire, and his estate, *terra Gisonis episcopi*, was the second to Glastonbury in value and extent among the ecclesiastical estates.

Giso lived over the Norman Conquest; he also lived over the Council at St. Paul's in 1075 according to which the seat of the bishop was to be transferred from the country village of Wells to the more populous and historic city of Bath.

But he did not live to see his building destroyed, his brotherhood broken up and his canons scattered, by his successor John of Tours in 1088. Wells then lost its pre-eminence of 200 years as the seat of the bishop, the church was left to decay, the estate of the canons, tenants of the bishop, was farmed out by the provost as steward to



Wells Cathedral from
Market Street.

his brother Bishop John, who grievously afflicted them—while the palace and Norman church were rising at Bath.

It was a mark of pious respect to the memory of his Saxon predecessors in the see, as well as a politic act to denote the priority of Wells, and the continuity of his own episcopate with Saxon times, that Jocelin in the thirteenth century constructed the effigies of these bishops of earlier days, and laid them in honour on the bench table on each side of the presbytery of his church—Dudoc and Giso, and four others.

The Makers of Wells

The bishops of the next hundred years, Robert of Lewes, 1131–1166; Reginald de Bohun, 1174–1191; Jocelin of Wells, 1206–1242; were the makers of Wells.

The history of the present church begins with Robert, the monk of the great Cluniac priory of St. Pancras at Lewes.

He brought the seat of the bishop back again to Wells, and laid the foundations of its present fabric and constitution.

Amidst the endless agitation and anarchy of Stephen's reign "when barons and many bishops took arms, fought in battle, divided the spoil, built castles, oppressed the people," Robert was quietly working out the constitution and fabric of his church at Wells, which, like a house built upon the rock, has stood the storms around it of more than 700 years.

He had before him in other cathedral churches, as at York, the form of government which the Norman bishops had brought with them into England from their churches of Rouen and Bayeux.

The lands of the bishop were divided between the bishop and his canons, no longer tenants of the bishop, but a body having a separate and independent estate in common, and each endowed with a separate freehold called a prebend.

The Outer Life
From Tower

The bishop's position was monarchical. He was the head of the body in church and council, he appointed the canons and officers, but the executive government was vested in the officers and dignitaries appointed by him with definite offices, and the canons were a representative body from the diocese, under their head the dean, who was elected by themselves from the common body.

To the old Saxon church, neglected for fifty years and falling into decay, Robert brought with him the architectural associations of Clugny and of Burgundy, and the more advanced style of the later Norman churches in which the pointed arch had been already introduced.

He consecrated his new work on the old church, its altar and eastern end, in 1148.

The stem of the font in the south transept may be the solitary relic of the Saxon church now remaining. The peculiar position of the font in the south transept may be due to that part having been the more frequented

entrance of the church when Giso's buildings clustered round that southern ground.

Reginald de Bohun, whose name bespeaks his Norman birth—two villages in the Norman Côtentin, "St. André de Bohun and St. George de Bohun," still preserve the name of the family, while his surname "the Lombard" or "the Italian" marks his early association with southern lands—was son of Jocelin de Bohun, Bishop of Salisbury and nephew of Richard de Bohun, Bishop of Coutances. A courtly cavalier in younger days, when attached to the suite of the chancellor and archbishop; then the king's president and conciliatory diplomatist, in his quarrel with Becket at Rome, at the court of the Count of Savoy, and at the Grande Chartreuse, whence he brought St. Hugh of Burgundy to the priory at Witham, Reginald was through life a man often chosen as negotiator and arbitrator in State affairs, and as such he was called to the Primacy in the last year of his life.

Undoubtedly he was one of the builders of the church. Evidences are contained in the Chapter documents. Years spent in his diocese, in which he made Wells the chief centre; his expressed care and solicitude for the building and restoration of the church at Wells; his grant of the revenues of all vacant benefices to form a permanent fabric fund; the notices of gifts to the fabric and of work going on at Wells during his episcopate, all testify that Reginald was a chief builder of the Cathedral. Reginald was the consecrator in 1186, of one of the latest known Norman buildings, the Lady Chapel at the western end of the church of Glastonbury, which had been destroyed by fire. His semi-Norman building at Wells is to be traced in the north porch and eastern parts of the nave in which the heavy roll-moulding of the arcading of the triforium, the rude and fantastic imagery in the capitals of the columns with square abaci, and externally

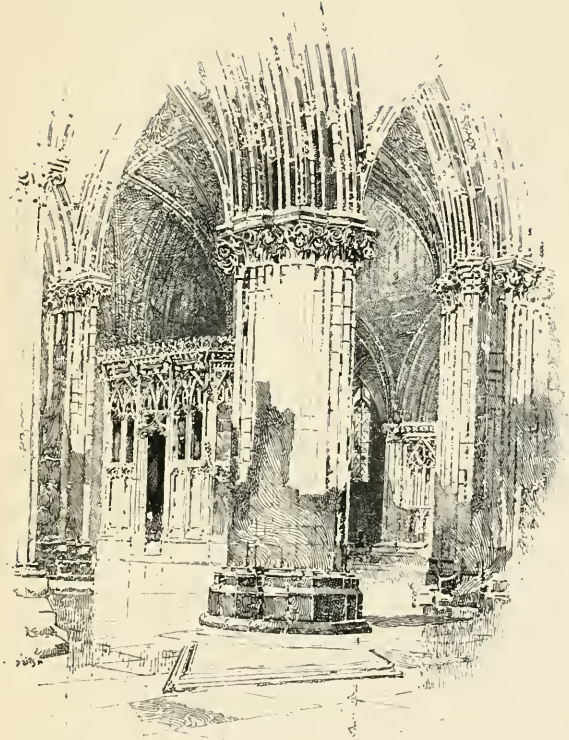
the flat buttresses and corbel table are marks of a transitional style passing from Norman to Early English, lighter than the Norman, more massive than Early English.

Savaric, the wild adventurer following the steps of his master Richard abroad—

> "Through the world travelling, all the world's guest,
> His last day of life his first day of rest"—

left little mark on the fabric, or the constitution of his diocese, except in his forcible attempt at curbing the independence of the monastic houses under his sway He left the title of Bath and Glastonbury for a few years to his successor.

Jocelin of Wells was the remodeller and finisher of the work of his predecessors, rebuilding, and adding new and original work. He and his brother Hugh, Archdeacon of Wells and afterwards bishop of Lincoln, were "men of the soil." After years of exile and of political trouble in the days of John,



South Transept and Nave

Jocelin stood by Stephen Langton at Runnymede, and then in his diocese he devoted himself to the work of building up Wells, his native city, to be the centre of the diocese—increasing the prebends, remodelling the offices, providing houses for the canons, a school for the choristers, a grammar school of higher education, a hospital for the wayfarers—building his palace, enclosing and stocking his park, building and repairing a manor house and chapel at Wookey.

Above all he raised up the west front, probably extended beyond the lines of the original Saxon church, in the style in which his friend Bishop Poore was building at Salisbury, and proceeded eastward to meet the arcading of his predecessor's work. Then when he had sufficiently built, furnished, and endowed, he consecrated the finished work shortly before his death in October 1242. Tradition has assigned the whole work to Jocelin—but "vixere fortes ante Agamemnona." Reginald and Robert were builders

before him—and these three are "the first three" master-builders of our holy and beautiful house of St. Andrew in Wells.

According to our view the church of the thirteenth century then included the three western arches of the present choir—the transepts, and central tower to the height of the vaulting, the nave, north porch and west front. We must suppose the three arches of the present choir, and the triforium now closed, to have been exactly similar to the arches and triforium of the nave. The present choir was then the presbytery. The choir was under the tower and in the transepts. A screen with roodloft above, resting against the columns of the first bay of the arcade westward of the piers of the tower arch, separated nave and aisles from choir. At the entrance of the choir, on each side of the central door in the screen, stood two altars, one in honour of the Blessed Virgin and the other of St. Andrew. The statutes of Dean Haselshaw's time, 1298,

show that there was reason for separating off for greater privacy the eastern parts of the church. There the ministers of the church were continually on duty in the daily offices, and were guardians of the sanctuary and of the treasures of the church. The nave was a place of public resort, of traffic, often of tumult. But here also were the public prayers, the processions and litanies for the people, and the reading of the lections.

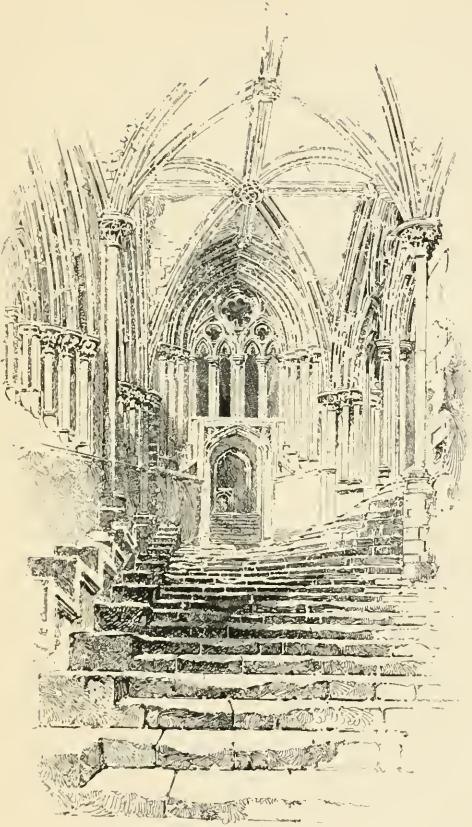
In this review of the thirteenth-century church it is necessary to suppose at the same time a good deal of subsequent renewal and recasting of the interior of the church in the later years of the thirteenth century, especially in the north and south transepts where, as is well known, damage was caused by an earthquake in 1248, which shook down a spire, or portion of the tower.

Reconstruction in the XIVth Century

The church of Jocelin was yet to undergo a great development in the course of the next

century ; but building was delayed for many years by the conflict with Bath which ensued at Jocelin's death.

The favour which Jocelin had shown to Wells during his lifetime was consummated by the bestowal of his body at death on the church. His burial before the high altar consecrated Wells as the first church of the diocese, and made a great breach in the traditionary honour of the church of Bath, which for the last hundred and fifty years had been the burial-place of the bishops of Bath. It provoked the jealousy of Bath, and the monks made an attempt to carry the election of his successor without the participation of the Chapter of Wells. Costly appeals and embassies to the king and the Roman Curia followed, which involved both Chapters in heavy debts ; finally the arbitrament of Innocent IV. in 1244 determined the equal rights of both Chapters in the election of the bishop, who from henceforth should always bear the title of "Bath and Wells."



Stairway to Chapter House and Cloan Gate

Nearly forty years after Jocelin's death, about 1280, building was taken up again, chiefly by Dean Thomas Bitton, who afterward, as Bishop of Exeter for fifteen years 1292–1307, reconstructed the choir of Exeter. He began on the lines of Jocelin's work in the octagonal building which now forms the undercroft of the chapter-house. The massive style of that building, and the similarity of its columns and vaulting to the undercroft of the palace, give reason for thinking that it had been begun by Jocelin to serve the purposes of a sacristy, treasury, and meeting-place of the canons. Upon it was now erected, within the next thirty years, the noble chapter-house, unique among chapter-houses for the approach outside by the stately ascent of stairs, flanked by three richly moulded windows of early Decorated style, glowing with quarries of dark amber glass. The stairs swept round into the lofty double arches of the portal, and through it opened out the octagonal upper chamber,

with a slender palm-like central pillar, from which spread the branching roof with manifold radiating arms enclosing the tent-like canopy of stone. This beautiful chapter-house was not as now a bare and empty hall for most days of the year, but it was the daily home and centre of the life of the community, where each and all held communion and fellowship one with another, and with their brethren departed, "dead, dispersed, or changed and changing." Every morning, when the office of prime was over at 9 A.M., and before the Chapter mass in the church, the choir and Chapter passed in orderly procession up this ascent into the "house of the Chapter."

The business of the day was preceded by an office, the "Martyrology" or commemoration of the faithful departed; psalms were said, lections read. The obits, or anniversaries of benefactors were announced from the *pulpitum* in front of the bishop's stall, and the appointed services for day or week

were read out. There followed the business transactions—hearing of complaints, making of inquiries, passing of sentences, correcting of faults before the whole body—then, when the vicars and choristers had left, the private conference and acts of Dean and Chapter.

This meeting day by day in the chapter-house formed part of the common life of the cathedral body.

Buildings followed in quick succession under the rule of Dean Godley and his master workman, William Joy—the elevation of the central tower above the level of the roof, 1315–1321—and then the graceful Lady Chapel, finished in 1326 as a detached building. Two recumbent figures on tombs, so similar in design and sculpture that they appear to be the work of the same time and hands, rest at the entrance to the Lady Chapel. One is the tomb of Bishop Drokensford, the other we may believe to be that of Dean Godley, the two contemporaries in office and work upon this building. Bishop

Ralph of Shrewsbury, 1329–1363, carried on the works which Dean Godley had begun, and which resulted in the present arrangement of the eastern limb of the church. The presbytery was prolonged eastward, the side walls were built up, supporting the clerestory and the vault; the delicate triple arches supported the eastern wall where once, undoubtedly, was a high reredos of sculptured figures and tabernacle work behind the high altar now moved eastward. Above, the eye looked up to the great window of the choir, one of the most remarkable windows in England for simplicity and harmony and richness of colouring, for the force of character in the faces, and the stately figures in flowing mantles of green and ruby and gold, like Arab chiefs; figures such as some artist in the last crusading host under Edward might have seen and designed, and so different from the conventional portraiture of Bible characters. Then followed the junction of the church with the Lady Chapel and its tran-

S.E. doorway to Cloisters
Central Tower and

septs, by the arcading under which passed the processional path behind the high altar.

So in the reconstructed church the presbytery of the thirteenth century became the new choir, and the sanctuary was prolonged eastward under the newly constructed vaulting. New stalls were now erected in the new choir—for it had been decreed in Chapter, on the day of the Circumcision 1325, "because the old seats were decayed and out of fashion, *ruinosi et deformes*, that each and all of the canons should make their stalls at their own cost, and that each should pay for the making of his stall 30 shillings." The lofty canopied throne of the bishop in stone must have been erected about this time.

A remarkable characteristic of the church under these changes and reconstructions is the gradual and almost imperceptible transition of one style into another. Professor Willis describes the architecture of the church of the thirteenth century as a

"transitional Norman," and as "bearing a character unlike any Early English building," —so gradually the semi-Norman passes into Early English.

So, again, the Early English style flows on easily into the Decorated in the chapter-house and in the Lady Chapel.

In this later reconstruction of the east end, there is for the most part the like transition from the Decorated into the Perpendicular. But in the transformation of the earlier presbytery into the new choir some changes were made which rather rudely destroyed the identity of style between the arches of choir and nave. The arches are shorn of their hoods, the triforium arches are closed and built up, and a shallow panelling of tabernacle work is superimposed, as if to assimilate the new choir with the later work of the eastern end of the church.

Finally, the screen was advanced eastward under the eastern arch of the central tower,

Vicars Close

and now closed in the reconstructed choir, and separated it from the nave in proportions corresponding with the increased length of the church.

The completion of the "new work" and the reconstruction of the church during Bishop Ralph's episcopate entitled him to the honour of burial before the new high altar as second founder, or rather as finisher of the church, in 1363, and his beautiful alabaster tomb, which now lies in the northern aisle of the choir, at first was placed in the presbytery in front of the seat of the bishop, and before the high altar. Other great works have made memorable his episcopate; (*a*) the incorporation of the vicars choral, their endowment and settlement in the "Nova Clausa," "the new closter," "the Vicars' Close," which was begun in 1348, and gradually comprised a hall, a chapel, and houses in cloister-like row between, for a body of upwards of fifty vicars. But the new close was not completed for another century. The chapel

was finished by Bishop Bubwith, and the wooden ceiling and chamber above were added by Bishop Beckyngton, and it was not finished or consecrated finally till 1489; still year by year the vicars now commemorate Bishop Ralph on their founder's day, November 8th.

(*b*) While the eastern gable of the church was rising above the head of St. Andrew's spring, lower down by the side of the stream walls embattled and bulwarked, with towers and portcullised gateway, were girdling the palace; and the stream, cut into rectangular channels, enclosed within an islet the princely hall and buildings of the bishop. This somewhat ostentatious display of feudal lordship may have given some occasion to the outbreak of popular revolt which for a time disturbed the peace of Wells. The palace had been the scene of a royal visit in the early years of Bishop Ralph's episcopate. The young King Edward III. kept his court there (but without

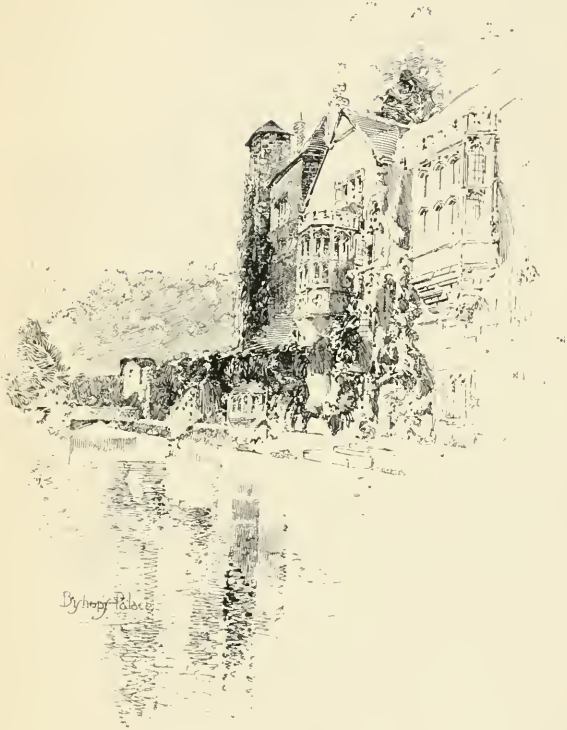
his bride Philippa, who remained at Clarendon) from Christmas to Epiphany, 1332. Shortly afterwards by a royal licence, forced upon him probably rather than sought for, he was empowered to "embattle" the precincts of the church, and also of his own houses. The townspeople of Wells, with the growing spirit of independence of the times, had been seeking, and had obtained, a new charter, giving them more local freedom, and their own mayor and bailives, for which they had actually paid to the Crown £40 and more. But the charter was no sooner purchased than it was revoked, after a long inquisition in the King's Court lasting from January 1342 to Michaelmas 1343, on the ground that it was to the prejudice of the king, and had been unadvisedly granted. Their disappointment was aggravated by this licence to their mesne lord, the bishop, which had been given shortly before, (dated 14 Edw., 1341), to "embattle" his palace, the more so as by a clause in their

charter they had hoped to be free of all services upon castles, walls, and all other works for the king throughout the realm.

In January 1342, a conspiracy was formed in the town to resist payment of the ordinary dues to the bishop's bailiff. The bishop levied distresses, the conspirators effected a rescue, and disturbances of some kind went on. In May 1343, a commission was issued to try the case, and in August 1343 the judges gave judgment for the bishop, with costs of £3000 to the rebellious burghers. It does not appear whether the bishop received the fine. The quarrel broke out again in after years, and the citizens obtained their charter in Henry IV.'s time, and finally and more fully in Queen Elizabeth's reign.*

The second decade in Bishop Ralph's episcopate is darkened by the cloud of the

* Year Book of 16 Edward III. (R. S.), where the whole case is legally set out by the Editor, L. O. Pike, Esq. (Introduction, p. xxxiv.).


Bishop's Palace

Great Pestilence, "the Black Death," which fell over the land in 1348 and 1349. This part of the country suffered less than some others; but the register of the bishop, who was then at his manor house at Wivelscombe, shows by the very large number of institutions at that time, how great was the mortality among the clergy of the diocese.

One notable feature in the interior construction of the church must be dated to this time, though there is no documentary evidence to fix the years within which the work was going on, namely, the supporting of the central tower, by the insertion of inverted arches within the tower arches on three sides, by strengthening the piers, and by building arches within the arcades west of the tower, and in the transepts. Every one is struck by this characteristic feature of the Church of Wells; the eye becomes reconciled to its bold and almost grotesque simplicity; but the effect of the lofty arches of the tower, not "condemned for ever to

rest upon its ungainly props," would have been far more pleasing.

Little now remained to complete the fabric of the church, except the completion of the western towers. Though fifty years passed between the building of the two towers, there is little difference in their style.

Bishop Bubwith, in his will dated October 1424, demised a sum of money for the construction of the "bell tower, or northern tower, at the west end of the church," to be then perfected, in a resemblance, as far as possible, to the southern tower, called Harewell Tower, and to be called and named "Bubbewith's Tower."

That north-west tower was built shortly after the bishop's death in that year 1424. In its western front are two canopied niches, in one of which is the figure of the bishop in prayer, holding his pastoral staff, and underneath is a shield charged with his arms.

Declension and Reconstruction

Chantries, or memorial tombs, on a grand scale of architectural pomp and beauty, are the characteristic features in the church of the fifteenth century. Bishop Bubwith, who had passed through the sees of London and of Salisbury to Wells, has left many memorials of his love for his last resting-place, not only in the north-western tower, but in the foundation of the library over the eastern cloister, and in the endowment of the alms-house, which still bears his name. He left also endowments for chaplains to say masses in his chantry which was erected about 1450. The chantry of Bishop Bubwith is on the site of the altar which stood at the north side of the choir door in the early screen, before which Bishop Haselshaw in 1306, was buried with special distinction. On the corresponding site, on the south side, the later and more ornate chantry of Treasurer

Sugar was built over the altar dedicated, in 1249, to the memory of St. Edmund of Canterbury. There had been a wooden chantry raised by Bishop Erghum in the earlier years of the fifteenth century, and taken down by Sugar, with licence from the Chapter to raise upon it this more ambitious, but very beautiful monument, at the close of the century. And midway in the century, the chantry of Bishop Beckyngton was built on the south side of the sanctuary. A painful interest attaches to this chantry, from the minute account which we have in the bishop's register, of the careful devotion with which the bishop dedicated his last resting-place, and the careless irreverence with which the chantry has been desecrated in these later days.

There, on January 13, 1452, at 5 A.M., he had consecrated the altar on the south side of the sanctuary "in honour of the Blessed Virgin and St. Thomas the Martyr," and, two days after, in the robes in which he

Gate-House and Moat

desired to be buried, he consecrated the place of his grave, on the south side of this altar, where Godwin says, "a goodly tombe was built by himself in his lifetime." One who was present officially when, unhappily, the monument was moved, and the canopy over this altar was taken down in 1849, thus writes his recollections :

"Beckyngton's coffin was never disturbed, but a curiosity, entirely without irreverence, moving Dean Jenkyns to inspect it, under his orders an attempt was made, under my constant watchfulness, to reach the coffin and, with the Dean present, to remove the lid. The difficulty of carrying out this project was excessive, for the grave had been filled not with earth but with blocks of stone, strongly bound together with hard cement. On the discovery of this singular form of fortification the attempt was abandoned."

Another memorial chapel of great magnificence once stood in the southern ground,

on the site of the "Lady Chapel by the cloister," of early date, the chantry chapel built by Bishop Stillington about 1480. Excavations made in 1894 laid bare the foundations of a chapel 120 feet in length from the western wall of the cloister, and revealed the richness of its architecture. But when the chantries were abolished and their endowments taken by the Crown in the reign of Edward VI., the support of this great addition to the church was felt to be a burden too heavy to be borne, and in 1552, a contract was made between the Bishop and the Chapter on one side and Sir John Gates then in possession of the palace on the other, that the chapel be taken down, and "the ground made fair and plane within the space of four years and a quarter next ensuing." Probably there was little reason to cherish the memory of Bishop Stillington, a political intriguer who was a state prisoner at Windsor during his episcopate.

The bishops of the latter part of the

fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, who bore the title of Bath and Wells, have left no mark on the cathedral church of Wells, though their names are well known elsewhere, and in other sees, and in kings' courts—Fox at Winchester, Oliver King at Bath. Adrian de Castello resided at Rome, and was involved in the plots of the infamous Borgia family. Wolsey, who by his own confession, gave to his ungrateful master more of that service which should have been given to God, was never resident in the palace at Wells.

A picture of Wells at this period before "the glory of the first house" had departed is given by a native of Wells, Thomas Chandler, Chancellor of Wells in 1452, and chaplain to Bishop Beckyngton. He is pointing out to his friend, a visitor from Oxford, the beauties of Wells: "The most lovely Church of St. Andrew, where is the throne of the learned and munificent prelate, Thomas, first of the name—the palace surrounded on

all sides by flowing waters, and bulwarked by its circlet of battlemented walls and towers. Is not the city rightly called Wells, where fountains gush out on every side, which both make and beautify the city?"

In the troubles of the seventeenth century Wells was brought under the harrows of Puritan tyranny. The choir was closed, the chapter-house was put up for sale at the price of £160; all services were forbidden except the preaching of Cornelius Burgess, who occupied the Dean's house and called himself "minister of the late cathedral."

When the Restoration came, an act of Chapter dated July 6, 1664, records that the cathedral church, brought to ruin in the late civil troubles, had been restored by the resident canons "almost from its foundations," at an expense far beyond the means of the Chapter, and now they "desire and ordain that the non-residentiary canons who have not contributed at all, not even a farthing, towards the repairs of the fabric

The Gardens

should restore and beautify their own stalls, at their own expense, for the glory and honour of the church, for their own comfort and dignity, for an example to posterity." A list of prebendaries holding the fifty stalls follows, with marginal notes in another hand marking a few donations of £2 2s. each. In answer to this appeal there was a liberal expenditure on the part of clergy and laymen of the church. Dean Creyghton gave the glass in the west window, probably brought from Holland, and the great brass lectern which bears his name and inscription. A new organ, which was in use until 1850, was given mainly by him, and hangings for the east wall behind the high altar. He also bore his part in the restoration and furnishing of the library at a cost of £300, and gave many valuable books. Dr. Busby the treasurer, more known to fame as the great headmaster of Westminster School, was also the giver of more than £300 at different times towards the bookcases and furniture

of the library, besides many books which he says he contributed as a self-imposed fine for defect of "residence." To him also the church owes the large silver gilt "alms' dish" in use to-day.

Among the "gifts and perquisites" in the Communars' Account of 1664 occur the following entries: "Sir W. Portman, £20 towards the organ; Sir John Coventry, £20; Francis Pawlet, 'for the decoration of one stall in the said church, £2 2s.'; John Hall, ditto; Dr. Byam, prebendary of Compton Dundon, 'for decoration of his stall,' £2 2s.; and similar sums by five other prebendaries."

Scarcely twenty years had passed after the restoration of the church when the mob of Monmouth's rustic followers invaded and damaged the building. A record is preserved in the Chapter acts of July 1, 1685, while this storm was sweeping over the church and town. Chancellor Holt held the quarterly Chapter meeting alone with the

notary in the chapter-house on that morning. He sorrowfully protested against the desecration of the church by "the rebellious fanatics who that very morning were in the act of destroying the furniture, breaking up the organ, and had made the house of God the stabling for their horses." Then he adjourned the Chapter and all affairs until that day four weeks, between the hours of 9 and 12 A.M., hoping that within that time "this tyranny will be overpast." Nor was that hope disappointed. The next words in the book of Chapter acts record that within six days the rout at Weston Zoyland in Sedgmoor had put an end to the rebellion, and the minutes of proceedings close with an outburst of thankfulness :

"Deus, Deus nobis hæc otia fecit."

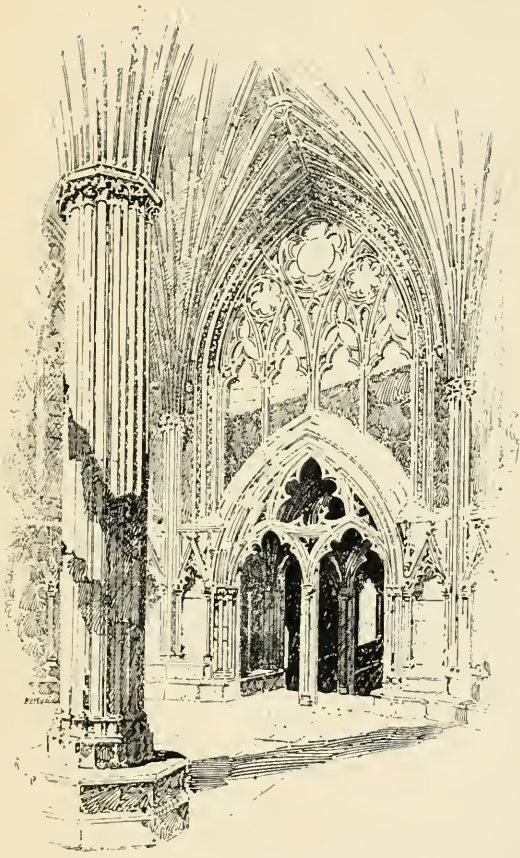
Bishop Ken's saintliness sheds a halo over Wells at this time, but soon calm and torpor settled down upon cathedral life.

There is nothing to record of building or

restoration which changed the character or look of the exterior.

The cyclone of 1703, which was so fatal to Bishop Kidder in his palace, was merciful comparatively to the fabric of the church, though the fabric accounts for 1704 and 1705 show a heavier expense in repairs than for several years before and after. Altogether the averages of expenditure upon the fabric during the century show that the Dean and Chapter were mindful of their charge in its maintenance.

But in the interior of the church the minutes of Chapter acts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries enable us to trace the gradual invasion and occupation of the choir by seats and pews and galleries, destructive of the older work, and marking the revolution which had taken place in the ordering of the Church services. Carpenters made rude havoc of carved work and delicate tracery when every available space in the choir, which now was "the church," was required



The Chapter House

for "sittings," to hear rather than to worship.

"Wives and daughters of gentlemen or clergymen in the Liberty, and not foreigners, are to sit in the stalls," was the order of the day.

In 1681, while Dr. Bathurst was Dean and Ken was Bishop, a seat is to be provided for the dean's lady "in the grates." This privileged seat was a curtained pew enclosed within "the grates," of fifteenth-century ironwork, and under the richly carved and coloured canopy which stood over the altar consecrated by Bishop Beckyngton in his chantry. The canopies and tabernacle work of the old stalls of the fourteenth century were ruthlessly truncated in order that a gallery might be built above them, and between the arches on either side of the choir, with a frontal of panelled and painted woodwork. The lower row of seats below the prebendal stalls was divided into enclosed pews, but the old seats of the prebends still remained

in their places with their "misericords" underneath, the slender dividing shafts supporting the carved hoods of each stall. The line of the stalls was in advance of the columns, which were completely hidden, even to the capitals, by the galleries; the choristers' desks and benches greatly narrowed the central gangway. Pews occupied the presbytery; the monument of Bishop Berkeley stood at the north side of the sanctuary until it was removed to make way for the more pretentious memorial of Bishop Kidder; Bishop Still lay on the south side, where the sedilia now are. Those who saw the choir at this period, in 1848, record that it presented an unusual amount of colour. "Under the coatings of whitewash and 'yellow dab,' which lay thick on the choir walls, were frequent evidences that the whole had been decorated with patterns, and the mouldings and mullions of the windows had been treated with painted rosettes. The throne of the bishop was entirely

painted over to represent green marble ; on the panel at the back was a rude representation of a landscape. This paint, being in oil, was extremely tenacious, and gave much trouble in removal, and the effect produced by the change was extraordinary. The stalls and the panelling over them, Bishop Beckyngton's canopy, Bishop Still's monument were coloured. The pulpit was draped with crimson ; the reredos, or wall behind the altar, was draped ; the pew sides and bench ends, and altar rails, and sounding-board to the pulpit were of dark oak, a great contrast to the white stone which has succeeded."

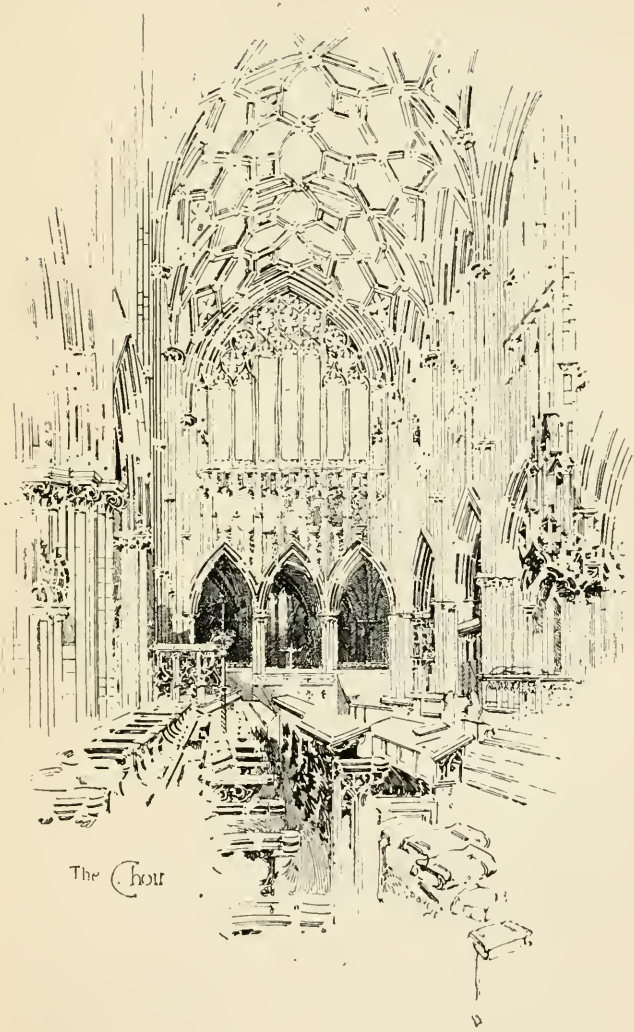
In the Lady Chapel, wood-panelling or wainscoting covered the east end ; when this was removed, niches and canopies of a reredos were found in the wall, their facing cut down smooth. This reredos, of later workmanship than the chapel, was restored as far as might be to its original form in 1845.

The old glass in the windows, which had been taken out probably at some time for

preservation, retained its beautiful colouring, but all designs were lost. Two high monuments of comparatively obscure persons were raised on each side of the altar against the windows, which they disfigured and partially blocked up.

In the middle years of this century a reconstruction of the choir was made with a zeal not always according to later knowledge, and innovations both in the ancient order, and in the material and the designs of the stalls were introduced.

The wooden stallwork was removed altogether, both the upper galleries and the old oaken stalls. Stalls of stone, with elaborately carved canopies of excellent workmanship, were built into the structure; but, beautiful as they are, some will regret the loss of wood, as the more appropriate material for furniture and as giving colour, and the destruction of the oaken stalls of early design and of historic interest. The seats of the prebendal stalls were preserved, but they were



The Choir

removed from their places in the upper row and were transferred to the lower row, where they were fitted by rude hands into places for which they were not originally constructed. The stone stalls were thrown farther back on the stone bench between the columns in order to give more width to the choir, and to display the columns to their bases. But by so doing the continuous line of the prebendal stalls has been broken and a consequent loss in the number of the stalls is involved. There are now only forty stalls instead of fifty. Ten prebends are without stalls—or by a clumsy and inconvenient arrangement one and the same stall is assigned to two prebends, and the prebendaries are left to dispute the priority of their claims, or to follow the famous precedent, which Mr. Freeman was never tired of quoting, of the two archbishops claiming the same stall, when Roger of York set himself down in the lap of Richard of Canterbury, and was furiously ejected by the men of Canterbury.

But, happily, while the canopied stallwork has perished, many of the seats have been preserved, containing specimens of excellent and quaintly carved woodwork in the remarkable series of "misericords" on their under sides. The obscurity of their position during later centuries of disuse has preserved them from injury, and in some cases they are as fresh as when struck off by the hands of the carvers. Sixty-four seats remain, of which fifty belonged to the prebendal stalls of the upper row; all have been deposed from their original and proper positions in the upper row, where seats of new and uncarved woodwork have been inserted between the stone sides. These seats are called "misericords" because, when turned up on end, they took pity (misericordia) on the weary at the long offices, and gave them rest as they stood. They remain the memorials of those early times of the fourteenth century, and of another phase of religious life, when long offices by night and

at early morning hours, and throughout the day, and watchings oft, and fixed times of duty and discipline, were the understood conditions to all who entered "religion," as well in secular as in monastic foundations. The carvings combine with the early semi-Norman sculpture and the grotesque capitals on columns in the nave and transepts, and with the solemn figures and imagery in stone on the western front, to complete a continuous series of mediæval carving in the church of Wells, remarkable for the blending of grim humour and playfulness, loving study of homely and natural subjects, with grave dignity and solemn and mysterious meaning.

In this slight sketch we have attempted to trace the history of the Church of St. Andrew by the Wells.

We have seen the little Saxon church, first planted by the waterside, grow into the Early English church of the thirteenth century under Jocelin, and then completed with Lady Chapel and loftier choir and tower

under Ralph in the fourteenth century. And under all these changes of growth the architectural features of the eastern end of the church have been reflected day by day for a thousand years in the still pools of St. Andrew's spring.

Now we leave the church by the western door. We follow the procession on some great festival of the thirteenth century, as clergy and choir with banners, singing hymns or reciting litany, passed out of the north door of the presbytery round the eastward processional path, down the southern aisle of choir and southern transept into the cloister, and then, after the prayer for the dead in the "Cemetery of the Canons," they passed round the cloister walks and out westward into the "Cemetery of the People," in the ground before the western doors of the church.

There, standing on the green sward which once was hallowed burial-ground, and looking up to that high western front peopled

The Chain Gate and Oriel

with array of sculptured figures, some hundreds in number still remaining after ages of decay, we seem to enter into somewhat of the meaning with which "this glorious work of fine intelligence" was raised in days when Art was servant to Religion, and the Church was teaching by appeals to sight and sound the mysterious presence of the unseen world, and of God and His saints, in the common life of man upon earth.

Here, as men laid their dead to rest, each in their graves, they might look up, and see, and read this "sermon in stones," telling, in one tier of sculptures, the story of man's creation and his fall, his redemption and his resurrection to life. Here in another tier they might see the commemoration of the faithful departed, kings and bishops, mailed warriors, and ministers of the sanctuary of all orders, queens and holy women, types of the honourable of the earth who had served God, standing in their places upon earth. And then, higher up, these are seen rising from their graves on the resurrection morning, to stand before the company of heaven, angels and archangels and the Twelve Apostles of the Lamb, and before the Son of Man seated on His throne, "high and lifted up" above all, in judgment. Faintly now can we imagine the impressive dignity and glory of this sculptured front, as the western sun glowed upon these stately figures, some of matchless grace, as

they stood out under the canopies of their niches, the shadows in the background darkened by artistic colouring.

We go away solemnised by the thought that we are here in presence of one of the monumental records of man's genius and art, mysterious in its origin, antedating the time of the great workers in sculpture and painting in Southern Europe—telling a story in stone of the unseen world, such as Dante sang in undying verse later in that century which produced this creation in our midst.

And the thought recurs again of the many generations of restless life which have passed in review beneath the eternal silence of these sightless gazers into the western sky; here again is

> "Central peace subsisting at the heart
> Of endless agitation."

Nowhere are such natural thoughts more truthfully expressed than by a poet of that western world where everything is so new,

as yet unmellowed by the softening hand of time, whence men come to gaze with such delight and depth of feeling upon these fragments of an older world of art and of religion :

> Looking up suddenly I found mine eyes
> Confronted with the minster's vast repose.
> I stood before the triple western port
> Where dedicated shapes of saints and kings,
> Stern faces bleared with immemorial watch,
> Looked down benignly grave and seemed to say,
> "Ye come and go incessant; we remain
> Safe in the hallowed quiets of the past:
> Be reverent, ye who flit and are forgot,
> Of faith so nobly realised as this." *

* Poetical Works of J. R. Lowell, "The Cathedral." I have ventured to substitute "western" for "northern," as it is written.

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